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Spring 2011

# Center for Catholic Education Newsletter, Spring 2011

University of Dayton

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## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Excellence Initiative is a professional development series of activities designed to bring best practice research around curriculum, assessment, differentiated instruction, and professional learning communities (PLCs) to Catholic school faculties and administrators. It began in fall 2008 with the support of generous funding provided by a local philanthropic group. This initiative was established in response to the existing difference between assessed skills of grade school graduates and the expectations for skill in content areas of Catholic high schools. It familiarizes Catholic school educators with a model, known as curriculum mapping, for aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

March 11, 2011, marked the Excellence Initiative's fifth professional development day for Catholic educators in the greater Dayton area. This special day was a culmination of the past presentations in that it tied together the development of PLCs for purposes of collaborating about curricular decisions, assessment data, and best instructional practice. Our presenter was Kenneth Williams, Chief Visionary Officer of Unfold the Soul, LLC, a company dedicated to inspiring individuals. Williams is affiliated with Dufour and Dufour, renowned experts in the field of PLCs, and Solution Tree, an organization providing professional development that builds schools where all children learn.

Through his presentation, Every Child, Every Day—Professional Learning Communities at Work, Williams assisted us in more fully understanding

PLCs and how they are powerful collaborative teams. As a former teacher, assistant principal, and principal he was able to share his experience and expertise on how to develop productive, student-focused learning environments and inspire individuals and teams to perform at their highest level. Offering practical and effective strategies for teachers to create and strengthen their own teams, Williams captured the audience with his lively presentation and inspired them to go forth with hope and a clearer vision of the effectiveness and productivity that is possible with a PLC. Having attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through high school, Williams shared his passion for and willingness to move our schools forward in this endeavor.

Within the professional development day, teachers and other essential school personnel had the opportunity to gather with those who have similar teaching responsibilities and roles.

Feedback was solicited from each group concerning interests and practical suggestions for establishing PLCs among Catholic schools in the Dayton and Springfield areas. As Williams suggested, these high performing teams will improve academic achievement with targeted goals and reflective practice.



# LALANNE

*Written by Sr. Michelle Kelly, SND, Principal at St. Thomas Aquinas School in Cleveland, OH*

## A Principal's Point of View

My involvement with Lalanne was actually an "inherited" involvement. When I came to St. Thomas Aquinas as a brand new principal, there were already two Lalanne teachers teaching kindergarten and sixth grade. Katie and Tara were wonderful introductions to the Lalanne program. They were bright, dedicated, fun, and more than willing to do anything to help their students succeed. That was seven years ago, and I am more convinced of the benefits of being a Lalanne School now than ever.



*Erin Wiese, a Lalanne teacher from 2005-2007, received the Head of the Class award while teaching and coaching at St. Thomas Aquinas*

Having Lalanne teachers is, I believe, part of what makes our school special. We have young teachers, just starting out on this amazing journey of education. They are committed...to their faith, to the mission of Catholic education, to

the benefits of community, and to their own professional growth.

What more could a principal ask for in a teacher? But there IS more. These are beginning teachers, with all the struggles and difficulties those first and second years can bring. However, they come with a support system that I could never provide myself. Along with the mentor teacher that every beginning teacher gets, Lalanne teachers LIVE with other young teachers, supporting them, praying with and for them, and encouraging them to persevere. On top of that, they have the Lalanne staff who observe them and challenge them to be even better teachers—even better people—than they already are.

My Lalanne teachers, Katie, Tara, Kyle, Erin, Lindsay, Ashley, Katherine, and Erin, have been a blessing in my life. Not only have they been wonderful teachers, making a difference in the lives of inner-city kids, but they have reminded me of the enthusiasm that new teachers bring to education, and that those of us who have been doing this a while can lose sight of. Through their tears and their laughter, they have shown me that their children really do matter to them, and their openness to grow has challenged me to be a more encouraging and supportive principal. It is my prayer that their time at St. Thomas Aquinas has shown them what a difference being a Catholic school teacher really can make in the life of a child.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

One of many significant accomplishments for the Center for Catholic Education (CCE) during the past year was the creation of a strategic plan to carry the center through 2013. George Lisjak, Director of Marianist Educational Studies and Partnerships, facilitated discussions with team members Susan Ferguson (Director of the CCE), Jacinta Mergler (Director of Lalanne), Linda Russell (Director of Urban Child Development Resource Center), and Barb Miller (Office Manager) to flush out core strategic goals, redesign the CCE's mission and vision statements, and establish core values and beliefs that are central to their work. From these

discussions, five core strategic goals for 2010-2013 emerged:

- \*To become a nationally recognized leader in research and programming for Catholic schools
- \*To maintain a focus on the core programs of Lalanne and UCDRC
- \*To expand the scope of service in response to the needs of Catholic education
- \*To adhere steadfastly to core values and beliefs
- \*To improve connections with those who share the CCE mission

After the revised strategic plan was complete, it was the desire of the group to consult with an

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# URBAN CHILD DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE CENTER

*By Linda Russell, Director of UCDRC*

On Christmas Eve night, 2010, I got into bed and started my nightly prayer ritual. Actually, at 1:30 a.m. it was technically Christmas Day. I began my prayers by giving thanks for the many blessings I have in life. Immediately, I visually flashed upon the scene that took place on December 15 in the Madonna Room, located in the back of Corpus Christi Church. It was the site where the majority of families served by UCDRC came to pick up their Christmas gifts collected by UCDRC family advocates Michelle Sherman and LaTasha Akpan.

It was not the first time I had helped distribute Christmas gifts to families, but for some reason this year had a profound and delayed impact on me. For the first time, many people who had never before needed help asked for assistance. With the significant job loss attributed to the poor economy and the large number of people already living in generational poverty, UCDRC was inundated with requests for aid. In fact, gifts were given to a total of 127 families during the holiday season, translating to 352 students, ages pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

My flashback began the way that afternoon in December had begun: The delivery truck was running a little late. The line of people waited quietly and patiently, babies in tow. When it finally arrived it was packed FULL of gifts for 90 families, enough for 240 children. As the truck was unloaded, UCDRC members sorted gifts by family, then distribution began.

It is difficult to put into words the humbled expressions on parents' faces. Many could only sit on the floor and cry as they were overwhelmed by the amount of gifts designated for their family. Amazingly, each child received a minimum of \$150 in gifts from the donors of Giving Angels. We sat on the floor with families, helped them load their cars, gave out many hugs, and made reassurances that we would convey to the donors the impact of their generosity.

An elderly woman on dialysis got out of bed and came with a friend to collect her grandchildren's

gifts. Her physical weakness would not get in the way of her grandchildren having a Christmas. One gentleman wanted all of us to know that this was his first year of having to ask for help because he no longer had a full-time job. As difficult as it was, he swallowed his pride to make sure his kids would not go without. He also assured us that he would be back on his feet next Christmas and he would be on the giving end for Christmas 2011.

Useful gifts for the entire family, such as microwave ovens, new dishes, and pots were often included. The unexpected generosity was too much for many to bear, and we saw the emotional breakdown of several adults. Accepting gifts from total strangers does take its toll on recipients, as it takes a lot of courage to hold out your hand for help.

While each family wrote messages of thanks, what happened in the Madonna Room far outshone anything I can write about. Hearts and emotions are difficult to capture with words. On this Christmas Eve, I likewise became overwhelmed with the emotion and love that went into this giving occasion and from all that was done for the people served by UCDRC. All of these scenes replayed in my mind as I lay in bed and prayed.

The goodness of people extending themselves to those in need shines during the holiday season. I cannot say thank you enough to all who made Christmas so special, but to all of you, all of us with UCDRC wish you many blessings as you journey through life.

## **The following funders made Christmas 2010 magical:**

- \* Hannah's Treasures/Giving Angels
- \* St. Vincent de Paul
- \* Marianist Mission
- \* University of Dayton Golden Flyers
- \* University of Dayton Center for Catholic Education
- \* Immaculate Conception School
- \* St. Anthony School
- \* Crayons to Classrooms
- \* Many individual donors



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**[www.udayton.edu/~cce](http://www.udayton.edu/~cce)**

Every gift, regardless of size, makes an impact on the work of the CCE. If you would like to support the CCE, you may do so by check, cash, credit card, or online at <http://support.udayton.edu>. Please choose the "a special designation" option and list the CCE in the Comments box. Thank You!

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outside source to evaluate their work. Dr. Matt Shank, Dean of the UD School of Business, allowed Flyer Consulting to work with the CCE staff. Flyer Consulting is the philanthropic arm of Flyer Enterprises, UD's student-run business, and offers management and organizational consulting assistance to non-profit organizations. The analysis by Flyer Consulting offered support for the Center's strategic plan as well as recommendations to help achieve their desired goals over the coming years. A top recommendation was the need for better marketing and promotional activities to highlight the CCE's

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role on campus and to increase its visibility throughout the greater Dayton area and beyond.

As a first step toward better marketing, Flyer Consulting arranged for the student newspaper, *Flyer News*, to compose an article about the CCE in its February 22, 2011, issue. Immediate recognition from this article resulted in contact with a school district in New Jersey interested in finding a way to collaborate with the Center in its efforts to promote Catholic education. The CCE looks forward to future partnerships and collaborative endeavors for the betterment of Catholic schools throughout all dioceses.